



W.A.M.I.

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In Support of H.B. 5248 - Session Year 2022
An Act Concerning Collateral Consequences of
Criminal Convictions on Occupational Licensing

Thank you, Chairperson and members of the Committee, for providing me with the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 5248.

I am an Operations Manager at Women Against Mass Incarceration, a non-profit dedicated to empowering women and girls in efforts to end mass incarceration while bringing injustices in the criminal legal system to light. I am also a formerly incarcerated woman impacted by the same system. Through my experience, as well as my work, I have lived and witnessed the inequalities that lie within our current legislation, which hinder the growth and successful re-integration of so many.

As someone who has endured the difficulties of reentry, I believe our current system oppresses those like myself who live with a criminal record that seems to define us. As a young girl, I made a choice that changed the course of my life. Despite this, I live strongly and know I am not defined by my past, but as much as I choose to live in this frame of mind, I am constantly reminded of these choices when seeking employment, education, housing, public assistance, and more. It seems that no matter how hard someone like me works to turn their life around, we are constantly held back.

As a Latina woman, I have faced even more adversity both in and out of the criminal legal system. Discrimination is systemically disproportionate for Black and Latinx people returning to society than it is for our white counterparts, as we are incarcerated at unreasonably higher rates. I have been turned down in spaces that should help those like myself successfully re-integrate and thrive as productive members of society. As a former healthcare worker, I saw many barriers when trying to get back into that field, especially upon the suspension of my medical certification due to my record. When applying to go back to school, I saw similar barriers to education, an already difficult thing to afford. Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges I faced was trying to find adequate housing when reentering. Although I had worked hard to save up money for an apartment and held a fair credit score, most of my applications were rejected due to my "criminal history".

Reentry barriers like these make it very difficult for justice-impacted individuals and do not in any way reduce recidivism. It can sooner lead back to the same struggles many started with. Passing HB 5248 will make a much-needed difference and reduce the collateral consequences faced by many.